

Relay Millennium Club

version 4.1

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1 The essence of RMC

1.1 A strong club?

Let us think for a moment about the popular “Precision” system. This utilises a strong $1\clubsuit$ opening, showing virtually any hand of 16+ HCP. This means that, in Precision, the other opening bids are limited. In particular:

- $1\spadesuit$, $1\heartsuit$, $1\spadesuit$ and $2\clubsuit$ all show about 11-15HCP.

Now, I have a problem with this. Why *should* the ranges of these four opening bids all be the same? I find it very hard to believe that an 11-15HCP range is optimal in all four cases. It is much more likely that there should be variations. Perhaps these variations are fairly minor, but I am sure they are there.

Of course, any Precision player will tell you that the range is not set in stone, and that many factors are taken into account, not just the raw HCP total. But I’m not interested in that. The fact is, the nominal ranges for the limited suit openings are all the same, or perhaps for some people they differ by 1HCP.

So, I shall now fiddle with the lower limit for opening $1\clubsuit$.

I haven’t talked about balanced hands yet, but in fact Precision pairs tend to play 1NT as 12-15HCP, 13-15HCP or 14-16HCP. The first of these ranges is a little unwieldy, and if you play 13-15HCP or 14-16HCP you will usually have to agree to open $1\spadesuit$ on weaker hands, which means that the $1\spadesuit$ opening is often made on a short suit. Wouldn’t it be so much better if you could open $1\clubsuit$ when you have 15HCP and a balanced hand? Then you could play a nice 12-14HCP range for your 1NT opener, and not have to bid $1\spadesuit$ on balanced hands at all. Let’s do this.

Next, consider the Precision $2\clubsuit$ opening. It’s a real mess. As a point of bidding theory, there are a number of important “safety levels” when you make a natural (or possibly-natural) suit opening. The most significant of these is two-of-your-suit. The next most significant is 1NT. Notice that the Precision $2\clubsuit$ opening has already breezed past the latter of these safety levels, and *any bid at all* from responder takes you past the former. In short, bidding over a Precision $2\clubsuit$ is a bit of a nightmare. If we’re going to use a natural $2\clubsuit$ opening (and, yes, we are) then we’d better make sure it’s very well-defined. In particular, the upper limit on strength should not be too high. So, let’s agree that we can open $1\clubsuit$ when we have 15HCP or more, if our longest suit is clubs.

So, our strong club opening starts at 15HCP on BAL hands and on CLUBS hands.¹ Some people like to open $1\clubsuit$ on *any* hand of 15+ HCP; this is playable,

¹It helps to think of there being six basic types of hands, which I will frequently refer to using SMALL CAPITALS. Balanced hands are denoted BAL. Single-suited and two-suited hands are divided into four types, depending on which suit is longest – hence these are known as SPADES, HEARTS, DIAMONDS or CLUBS hands. (Two-suited 5-5 and 6-6 hands “belong” to the higher-ranking suit – that is, the suit that you would open if playing standard methods.) Three-suited hands (any 4-4-4-1 or 5-4-4-0) are called 3-SUITED.

but it makes the $1\clubsuit$ opener very vulnerable to pre-emption. My preference is to raise the HCP requirement on other types of hands. In fact, in RMC you can open $1\spadesuit$ with up to 18HCP, and $1\heartsuit$ or $1\diamondsuit$ with any strength less than a game force.

1.2 Millennium Club ...

Millennium Club is the name of a system designed by Lyle Poe; the opening bids in his system are virtually identical to those I will set out here. It appears that he was the first person to come up with the idea, so the name of my system reflects the fact that it is a variant of his.²

1.3 ... with relays!

Our $1\clubsuit$ opener can be made with any shape of hand. However it usually turns out to be balanced: BAL hands are much more frequent than CLUBS hands, and with the other types we do not open $1\clubsuit$ unless very strong. Now, when you have a strong balanced hand, you are in the perfect situation for relay bidding – this means, you establish a game force, and then get partner to describe his hand to you, while you only ever make the cheapest bid available (the relay). This maximizes the amount of information that you can get about partner's hand. Once you know enough about partner's hand you can then name the final contract. The fact that you have hardly described your hand at all is not a problem – if you have a balanced or semi-balanced hand it is usually easy to pick the final contract on the basis of the information your partner gives you.

This works very well when you have a balanced hand. It does not work so well when you have an unbalanced hand. For this reason, the system is designed so that relays hardly ever apply unless the relayer is balanced. Thus, there are many game-forcing sequences in which both partners describe their hands to each other, using mainly natural bidding.

1.4 A short comparison with Poe's Millennium Club

The opening bids of the two systems are almost identical. One difference is that we open $1\clubsuit$ on all balanced hands of 15HCP or more, whereas Poe's version includes a natural strong 2NT opening. Also we require slightly less to open $1\clubsuit$ with a 5-card spade suit than Poe does, but we require slightly more to open $1\clubsuit$ with long diamonds.

But the main difference is in the responses to $1\clubsuit$. In Poe's Millennium Club, a $1\diamondsuit$ response shows hearts and $1\heartsuit$ shows spades. In RMC, these bids are still used to show the major-suit hands, but we also respond $1\diamondsuit$ on most hands not strong enough for game opposite an 18-count. This has the advantage that we

²In fact it would appear that the basic principles of the system have been discovered independently by many other people. I first thought of it in the summer of 2002, and have been developing my version since then; I was mildly disappointed to find that there were already many similar ideas in existence.

can stay low when opener has a balanced hand of 19-20HCP, or when opener has a hand with clubs on which he needs to “reverse”. Our system of responses also works particularly well with relays. The disadvantage is that our 1♦ response is not as well defined as in Poe’s Millennium Club, and we will sometimes play in 1NT rather than a 4-4 major-suit fit.

2 The opening bid in first and second seat

2.1 Definitions

Below is a description of the opening bids, as might be found on a convention card.

1♣	Forcing, 15+ HCP. One of the following hand types: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15+ HCP, balanced. • 15+ HCP with 5+ clubs; not precisely 4-5 in the minors unless the hand contains 19HCP or more. • 15+ HCP with a 4=4=1=4 shape (singleton diamond). • Any 4-4-4-1 shape with 20+ HCP. • (18)19+ HCP with 5+ spades or 6+ hearts. • Any hand worth a game force.
1♦	Natural, unbalanced with 4+ diamonds, but may have a longer club suit.
1♥	Natural, 5+ cards.
1♠	Natural, 5+ cards, limited to about 18HCP.
1NT	12-14HCP balanced.
2♣	10-14HCP with 6+ clubs, or 13-14HCP with 5 clubs and a 4-card major.
2♦+	Pre-emptive.

So, those are the definitions. Let us look more closely at each of the opening bids.

2.2 The 2♣ opening

The 2♣ opening is similar to that used by the Precision system, except that the upper limit on strength is a point less. The range for the bid is 10-14HCP; if at the lower end then we require a 6-card suit to open 2♣. We therefore pass quite often with 12HCP and a 5-card club suit.

Occasionally if we have a 5-4-2-2 shape we may choose to open 1NT in preference to 2♣. It is generally easier to bid constructively over a 1NT opening than over 2♣.

2.3 The 1NT opening

We play a weak no-trump, i.e. the 1NT opening shows 12-14HCP. The system is built around the assumption that all minimum balanced hands will be opened 1NT; indeed the system does not work at all with a strong no-trump. 5-3-3-2 shapes are always treated as balanced if the 5-card suit is a minor; it is a matter of style as to whether 5-3-3-2 hands with a major suit are treated as balanced.

The 1NT opening is often made on off-shape hands: in particular it may include hands of 5-4-2-2 shape with 5 clubs, and 4=4=1=4 hands. (With a 4=4=1=4 we may choose to pass with a minimum, but 1NT is the default opening with 13-14HCP. We could instead open 1M if the suit was particularly good.)³

2.4 The 1♥ and 1♠ openings

The natural major-suit opening bids show 5 cards. We open light, as in old-fashioned Acol. For example, with a 6-card suit, or a 5-5 pattern, we normally open at the 1-level if we have 10HCP. 5-4 shapes require about a point more.

The 1♠ opening is limited to about 18HCP. The 1♥ opening is not so limited, because with a strong two-suited hand we open 1♥ in preference to 1♣. (However, with a single-suited hand in hearts, we will open 1♣ on many hands of 18HCP or more.)

2.5 The 1♦ opening

1♦ shows a 4-card diamond suit and promises an unbalanced hand. This, therefore, is what we open if we have a 4-4-4-1 shape, as long as the singleton is not in diamonds. Hands with 5 clubs and 4 diamonds are opened 1♦ as well, provided that they are not too strong (19HCP or more). 1♦ can be opened light, but it tends to be sounder than a major-suit opening, particularly if playing a natural weak two in diamonds. The upper limit on a 1♦ opening is, however, *much* higher than for 1M. When we have an unbalanced hand in which diamonds is the longest suit, we always open 1♦ unless we have enough to force to game. So we could easily have more than 20HCP.

³This idea can be taken even further: it is perfectly reasonable to agree to open 1NT whenever you have a 5-4-3-1 shape with 5 clubs and not 4 diamonds. Obviously this adds more risk to the 1NT opening – for both you and your opponents – but it has the advantage that 2♣ can promise a 6-card suit. (You would also have to decide what to do with the 4=4=0=5 type, but these are *extremely* rare.)

2.6 The 1♣ opening

Finally we come to the strong club. It takes care of every hand which is too strong for one of the other opening bids. Notice that it starts at 15HCP on BAL and CLUBS hands, whereas everything else usually requires 19HCP or more. Since CLUBS hands are much less frequent than BAL hands, it follows that a 1♣ opener is usually balanced. This is an important point to note, because it is very helpful to responder when 1♣ is overcalled. For example, if they overcall at the two-level, then we defend against this in exactly the same way as if they had overcalled a strong 1NT opening.

2.7 Examples

1. ♠AT53 ♥KJ2 ♦83 ♣AKJ4. Open 1♣. This is a typical ‘strong no-trump’ hand.
2. ♠KQT64 ♥A52 ♦8 ♣Q987. Open 1♠. A normal minimum hand for a 5-card major opening.
3. ♠KQ4 ♥Q53 ♦9 ♣AKQ984. Open 1♣. Too strong for 2♣
4. ♠3 ♥QJ4 ♦AK832 ♣AKJ4. Open 1♦.
5. ♠76 ♥AT62 ♦5 ♣KQJ942. Open 2♣.
6. ♠KJ63 ♥K64 ♦T ♣AJ842. Pass. We are much more conservative in opening 2♣ when our suit is only 5 cards long. This hand is nothing special for a 12-count. But if we swap spades with diamonds we have a perfectly respectable 1♦ opener.
7. ♠J843 ♥Q9 ♦A8 ♣AQJ53. Open 1NT. This is another way that we can avoid a 2♣ opening. In this example we are fortunate enough to have honours in every suit, but even with a small doubleton the 1NT opening is recommended.
8. ♠AK3 ♥KQJ4 ♦KQ94 ♣A4. Open 1♣. This is the sort of hand where we hope to be able to use our relays.
9. ♠A73 ♥AKT8 ♦5 ♣KT984. Open 1♣. This hand does only have 14HCP, but its quality is excellent and the hand is easily good enough to upgrade to a strong club.
10. ♠K6 ♥Q52 ♦AK842 ♣KJ4. Open 1♣. A 1♦ opening is wrong because it promises an unbalanced hand. If instead we have a 5-card *major* suit, then it can be opened either 1♣ or 1M: this is really a matter of style.
11. ♠QJ73 ♥KJ43 ♦AK84 ♣2. Open 1♦.
12. ♠AJ9 ♥4 ♦AK42 ♣AJT63. Open 1♦. We nearly always open 1♦ with 4-5 in the minors.

13. ♠AJ9 ♥4 ♦AK42 ♣AKJT3. Open 1♣. With 19HCP or more, we are strong enough for 1♣ with this shape.
14. ♠AQJ4 ♥KJ43 ♦4 ♣AT96. Open 1♣.
15. ♠AKJT4 ♥3 ♦AJ2 ♣AK96. Open 1♣. This is normal for hands with 19+ HCP and 5+ spades.
16. ♠3 ♥AKJT4 ♦AJ2 ♣AK96. Open 1♥. When our suit is hearts, it is best not to open these hands 1♣. Part of the danger is that someone will be bidding spades. However, if we had a sixth heart, then the hand would be good enough to open 1♣.
17. ♠KQ53 ♥AKJT ♦AQJ2 ♣9. Open 1♣. A rare example of a 20+ HCP 4-4-4-1 hand.

3 Responses to the 1♣ opening

I will not describe here how I think you should respond to the opening bids other than 1♣. Our 1M and 1NT opening bids are very standard, and standard systems can be played over them. Similarly, a set of responses to 2♣ can be found in any book on Precision. The 1♦ opening is more interesting, but natural bidding works perfectly well, and a good system is described in Poe's book. But the responses to 1♣ need a lot of work.

Recall that 1♣ is forcing, and shows one of the following types of hands:

- 15+ HCP, balanced.
- 15+ HCP with 5+ clubs; not precisely 4-5 in the minors unless the hand contains 19HCP or more.
- 15+ HCP with a 4=4=1=4 shape (singleton diamond).
- Any 4-4-4-1 shape with 20+ HCP.
- (18)19+ HCP with 5+ spades or 6+ hearts.
- Any hand worth a game force.

The strong balanced hand is the most common possibility; I would estimate that at least 70% of 1♣ openers are balanced hands.

The responses to 1♣ are very different to in standard systems. A brief summary is as follows:

1♦	Shows one of two possible hand types: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any hand of 0-5HCP, or a bad 6HCP, without 5 spades; • A hand with 4+ hearts.
1♥	Shows 4+ spades. If in the 0-5HCP range, we need at least 5 spades.
1♠	6+ HCP, no 4-card major.
1NT	Forcing to game with 5+ diamonds.
2♣	Forcing to game with 5+ clubs.
2♦	About 6-8HCP with a good 6-card diamond suit.
2♥/2♠	Very weak hand with a 6-card suit.
2NT	5-5 in the minors, invitational values – about 6-8HCP.
3♣	About 6-8HCP with a good 6-card club suit.
3♦	Very weak hand, at least a 7-card suit.

With some types of hand, the choice of response will depend on which relay schemes we choose to play. One possibility for the relays is to adapt the scheme used by some Precision players called “symmetric relay”. I will be describing a slightly different approach, and this has important implications for the way we respond to 1♣.

3.1 Responding to 1♣ with a weak hand

In this system we say a hand is weak if we do not want to play in game opposite a normal balanced 18-count. In practice this means that weak hands usually have 5HCP or fewer, though we may occasionally downgrade a 6-count.

With most weak hands, the correct response to 1♣ is 1♦. The most important exception is that if we have a 5-card spade suit we should respond 1♥ instead. (You *could* choose to bid 1♦ with this hand, but you would not be able to show your spade suit later.) Alternatively we can show a weak hand with a long suit by bidding 2♥, 2♠ or 3♦. There is no way to show a weak hand with long clubs immediately.

3.2 Hands with a major suit

Now suppose we have a stronger hand: that is, at least a decent 6-count. In this case, if our longest suit is hearts we bid 1♦, and if our longest suit is spades we bid 1♥. If we have equal length in a major and a minor, we always show the major suit first, just like in standard methods. This also applies to 4=1=4=4 hands (bid 1♥) and 1=4=4=4 hands (bid 1♦).

With precisely 4-4 in the majors, we respond 1♦ (showing the hearts), whereas with 5-5 or 6-6 in the majors, we respond 1♥. This is, of course,

the same method that is used in standard systems.

3.3 Balanced hands without a major

This is very simple – if we have a balanced hand with no major suit, we bid $1\spadesuit$ unless we are too weak (in which case we bid $1\diamondsuit$).

3.4 Hands with a minor suit

The $1NT$ response shows diamonds and the $2\clubsuit$ response shows clubs. This is the normal way to show a game-forcing unbalanced hand in which the longest suit is a minor. However, with a minor two-suiter we respond $1\spadesuit$ instead. For these purposes a minor two-suiter means 5-4, 5-5 or better than 5-5 shape; but 6-4 shapes are treated as single-suited.

With a hand in the 6-9HCP range, we have responses of $2\diamondsuit$, $2NT$ and $3\clubsuit$ available to show hands with good suits. If we do not have a hand suitable for one of these bids we have to settle for $1\spadesuit$. However, when we have a hand not worth forcing to game, we always show a 4-card major if we have one, even if we have a longer minor suit.

With a game-forcing 5-4-2-2 or 6-3-2-2 hand we sometimes have a choice. We can either show the minor suit or treat the hand as balanced. That means, we can show a 4-card major before a 5-card minor even if we intend to force to game. And with a 6-3-2-2 we are allowed to bid $1\spadesuit$ in preference to showing our minor suit. This often works out better, particularly if we intend to raise a $1NT$ rebid directly to $3NT$, as it gives away less information to the opponents. Another consideration is that if we respond $1NT$ holding diamonds we may wrongside the eventual no-trump contract. However this only works with a semi-balanced hand – if we have shortage somewhere we are likely to get into difficulties if we do not show our minor suit at once (and the relays assume that this is what you will do).

3.5 Examples

1. $\spadesuit J8 \heartsuit 532 \diamondsuit K9732 \clubsuit T42$. Bid $1\diamondsuit$. This is definitely a weak hand.
2. $\spadesuit AJ9643 \heartsuit K7 \diamondsuit 92 \clubsuit QJ7$. Bid $1\heartsuit$.
3. $\spadesuit A932 \heartsuit AKJ86 \diamondsuit 9 \clubsuit J43$. Bid $1\diamondsuit$. This time we bid $1\diamondsuit$ because of the heart suit.
4. $\spadesuit JT86 \heartsuit K5 \diamondsuit 9843 \clubsuit 742$. Bid $1\diamondsuit$. Not strong enough for $1\heartsuit$.
5. $\spadesuit K43 \heartsuit Q96 \diamondsuit 9652 \clubsuit J84$. Bid $1\diamondsuit$. Still not quite strong enough to bid anything other than $1\diamondsuit$. This is a very poor hand for a 6-count.
6. $\spadesuit A52 \heartsuit T32 \diamondsuit QT952 \clubsuit 84$. Bid $1\spadesuit$. This is a 6-count with nothing to be ashamed of.

7. ♠4 ♥K62 ♦A7932 ♣T853. Bid 1♠.
8. ♠K942 ♥T4 ♦A962 ♣T73. Bid 1♥. This is definitely a weak hand.
9. ♠J9864 ♥J2 ♦7654 ♣54. Bid 1♥. With 5 spades we bid 1♥ even with a very weak hand.
10. ♠J643 ♥92 ♦AQJT4 ♣86. Bid 1♥. We do not have enough strength to show diamonds instead of the 4-card major. But if partner rebids 1NT we may still be able to play in diamonds.
11. ♠QT43 ♥KJ54 ♦2 ♣K964. Bid 1♦. We 'show' hearts first when we have 4-4 in the majors.
12. ♠3 ♥KT98632 ♦7642 ♣J. Bid 2♥. Showing a very weak hand with a long suit. If we start with 1♦ we may never be able to tell partner that we have a suit this good.
13. ♠T ♥AT54 ♦KQ3 ♣QJ542. Bid 2♣.
14. ♠QJ2 ♥3 ♦AQ8762 ♣982. Bid 1NT. The 6-card suit makes this easily enough for a game force.
15. ♠K2 ♥93 ♦QT9432 ♣AQT. Bid 1♠. We intend to force to game, but this is one of those hands which is probably better described as semi-balanced than as a DIAMONDS hand.
16. ♠9 ♥QJ984 ♦K2 ♣AKJ84. Bid 1♦. Always show majors before minors.
17. ♠T2 ♥– ♦AK9843 ♣AJ652. Bid 1♠.
18. ♠J43 ♥72 ♦KQJ765 ♣98. Bid 2♦.
19. ♠65 ♥KQJ6 ♦KQ984 ♣94. Bid 1♦. 1NT is also possible, but we would rather not wrongside no-trumps. But move the ♠5 to clubs and we would have to respond 1NT otherwise partner will refuse to believe that we have a singleton.

4 1♣:1♦

The 1♦ response to 1♣ is by far the most common, as it comes up about 50% of the time. The structure of opener's rebids is very important:

1♥	Relay: promises 18+ HCP, usually either balanced, or unbalanced with clubs.
1♠	Shows hearts: either a balanced 15-17HCP with 4 hearts, or an unbalanced hand with 3+ hearts.
1NT	15-17HCP balanced, without 4 hearts.
2♣	15-18HCP with 5+ clubs and at most 2 hearts. May have a 4-card spade suit.
2♦	Game-forcing unbalanced hand with either 5+ spades or 5+ diamonds.
2♥	19+ HCP with 5+ hearts (6+ unless game-forcing); forcing for one round.
2♠	About 19-22HCP with 5+ spades; <i>not</i> absolutely forcing.
2NT	4=1=4=4 (short hearts), about 20-22HCP, not forcing.
3♣	15-17HCP with a very good club suit. Denies 3 hearts.

4.1 The relay 1♣:1♦,1♥

The relay is used for most hands of 18+ HCP. Usually opener will have a balanced hand. Alternatively he might have an unbalanced hand with 5+ clubs. But he will not have an unbalanced hand with primary diamonds, hearts or spades.

When opener bids the 1♥ relay, responder must reply 1♠ if he has a weak hand with fewer than 5 hearts. (In fact we also bid 1♠ when we have a hand with precisely 4-4 in the majors, any strength.) All other responses promise at least four hearts: these responses will be covered in a later section. For now, we need to see how opener can continue when he hears the weak response. So, the auction has gone 1♣:1♦,1♥:1♠, and now opener bids as follows:

1NT	18-20HCP balanced.
2♣	18-22HCP unbalanced with 5+ clubs. Not absolutely forcing.
2♦	21-22HCP balanced.
2♥	23-24HCP balanced.
2♠	Forcing to game with 5+ clubs and 4 spades.
2NT	25+ HCP balanced.
3♣	Forcing to game with 6+ clubs.
3♦/3♥	Game-forcing with 5+ clubs and a 4-card side suit.

When opener rebids 1NT, there is no point playing your usual 1NT system because responder has denied a 5-card major. So bids of 2♣ and 2♦ should be to play; bids of 2♥ and 2♠ should be invitational with a 4-card suit; 2NT, 3♣ and 3♦ are also invitational. 3♥, 3♠ and 3NT show hands with precisely 4-4 in the majors (diamond shortage, club shortage, no shortage respectively).

When opener rebids 2♦ or 2♥, responder can bid the next step up to ask opener to bid 2NT. After this, some form of 5-card Stayman would be useful, but transfers to the majors are pointless.

When opener shows an unbalanced hand, the easiest method is to play that the cheapest rebid is a further negative, not necessarily showing a Yarborough, but just indicating that there is no suitable constructive bid for the hand.

4.2 1♣:1♦,1♠ showing hearts

Opener should rebid 1♠ on the following hand types:

- 15-17HCP balanced with 4 hearts;
- Any hand less than a game force with 5+ clubs and 3+ hearts;
- Any 4-4-4-1 with 4 hearts.

A 1♠ rebid is *not* suitable with a balanced hand of 18+ HCP, or an unbalanced hand with primary hearts (rebid 1♥ or 2♥ instead). Also if you have an unbalanced hand with primary spades or diamonds you should not bid 1♠ (start with 2♦ to force to game).

If responder has a weak hand without four hearts, he will have to bid 1NT. Opener can take this out with an unbalanced hand: 2♣, 2NT and 3♣ all show 5+ clubs; 2♦/2♥/2♠ show 4-4-4-1 hands with singleton diamond/club/spade respectively; bidding one of these suits at the 3-level shows a game-forcing 4-4-4-1 type.

If responder has a weak hand *with* 4 hearts, he can bid 2♦ as a transfer. Opener will not complete the transfer if he has a particularly good hand.

With a better hand, responder can bid 2♣ asking opener for more information. Opener should describe his hand as follows:

2♦	Minimum with only 3 hearts. (Now responder can sign off in 2♥ or 3♣; other bids are mostly natural, except for 2NT which shows 5+ hearts and asks opener to show a singleton if he has one.)
2♥	15-17HCP balanced with 4 hearts, or maybe a minimum 2=4=2=5 hand.
2♠	Shortage in spades. Usually 15-17HCP or so, but also includes stronger hands with a spade <i>void</i> .
2NT	Very strong hand with 4 hearts – at least 20HCP.
3♣	Better than minimum, only 3 hearts. Forcing to game.
3♦	Shortage in diamonds.
3♥	2=4=2=5, better than minimum.
3♠/4♦	Splinter, showing a singleton (not a void) and usually 18-20HCP outside the short suit.
4♣	4 hearts and a very good club suit.

4.3 Opener's 1NT rebid

Responder will usually pass this with a weak hand, though he is able to take out into a minor suit. If instead he has a decent hand with hearts he will often want to explore further. The methods used are described in a later section.

4.4 Opener's rebids showing unbalanced hands

After 1♣:1♦,2♣ responder will always pass with a weak hand. Bidding 2♦ shows a hand with 4+ hearts in the 6-9HCP range, and asks opener to describe his hand further (but responder does not promise to bid again). 2♥ shows a 6-card heart suit and is constructive but not forcing. All other bids are natural and forcing to game (even 3♣).

Similarly after 1♣:1♦,3♣ responder will nearly always pass with a weak hand. Other bids imply a heart suit and are forcing to game.

After 1♣:1♦,2♦/2♥/2♠, we use the first step as a negative; all other bids show a fairly good hand with hearts. Indeed, in the sequence 1♣:1♦,2♦ responder should bid 2♥ nearly all the time. This allows opener to rebid 2♠ if he has spades; anything else shows diamonds.

5 Other responses to 1♣

The sequences starting with 1♣:1♦ were rather complicated, but fortunately things are much easier after the other responses, except that there are several relay sequences to learn. We shall work through the responses in turn:

5.1 1♣:1♥

The 1♥ response shows spades. Opener's rebids are mostly similar to those after 1♣:1♦ – in particular, we use the completion of the transfer as a relay.

1♠	Relay: normally 18+ HCP, but maybe less with support. Usually either BAL or CLUBS, but also includes three-suiters and strong hands with 5 spades.
1NT	15-17HCP balanced without 4-card spade support.
2♣	15-17HCP with 5+ clubs and at most 2 spades.
2♦	15-17HCP with 5+ clubs and precisely 3 spades. (This is virtually identical to 1♣:1♦, 1♠:2♣, 2♦. Responder can sign off in spades or clubs, or bid 2NT to ask opener to show singletons.)
2♥	Strong hand with 5+ hearts, forcing for one round. (After this responder bids 2♠ with a weak hand; anything else is forcing to game.)
2♠	15-17HCP with 4-card spade support; usually balanced, or maybe a dead minimum 4=2=2=5. Good 17HCP hands with support can relay instead.
2NT	Forcing to game with 5+ diamonds.
3♣	15-17HCP with a very good club suit, and at most 2 spades.
3♦/3♥	Splinter – 4-card support for spades. Usually 15-17HCP or so, but also includes stronger hands with a void. (This is precisely the same as 1♣:1♦, 1♠:2♣, 2♠/3♦.)
3♠	4=2=2=5, invitational.
3NT	Running club suit, no support for spades.
4♣	Four spades and a very good club suit.
4♦/4♥	Splinter, showing a singleton (not a void), and about 18-20HCP outside the short suit.

Most of the time opener will rebid 1♠, 1NT or 2♣. We will deal with these sequences later.

5.2 1♣:1♠

The precise definition of the 1♠ response depends on the system of relays that we are playing. I am recommending the following version:

- About 6-9HCP, no 4-card major, not suitable for 2♦, 2NT or 3♣.
- Game-forcing balanced or semi-balanced hand with no 4-card major.
- Game-forcing minor two-suiter.

Opener's rebids after the 1♠ response are mostly natural, except for the relay which is 2♦. However it is important to note that, in contrast to after 1♣:1♦ and 1♣:1♥, opener's rebid of 2♣ is forcing and unlimited. Here is the complete structure:

1NT	15-17HCP balanced (or three-suited with shortage in diamonds).
2♣	5+ clubs, forcing for one round.
2♦	Relay, promising 18+ HCP, forcing to game.
2♥/2♠/2NT	Forcing to game with 5+ hearts / spades / diamonds respectively.
3♣	15-17HCP with a very good suit.

5.3 1♣:1NT/2♣

Here responder is showing a game-forcing unbalanced hand with a 5-card minor (but remember that minor two-suiters start with 1♠ instead). Opener rebids as follows:

2♣	(over 1NT) Unbalanced with 5+ clubs.
2♦	Relay: any balanced hand, or a strong three-suiter.
2♥/2♠	Natural, strong hand.
2NT	Over 1NT, this shows a minimum 4=4=1=4. Over 2♣, this shows a strong hand with 5+ diamonds.
3♣	Natural: over 1NT this promises a very good suit.
3♦	(over 2♣) Splinter.
3M	Splinter.

So this is all very natural, except for the relay.

5.4 Higher responses

The 2♦, 2♥ and 2♠ responses are similar to weak two opening bids (note that 2♦ here is significantly stronger than 2M). Over these bids, we use 2NT as a strong enquiry (I like to play this as asking partner to show a singleton); all bids in a new suit are natural and forcing.

After 1♣:2NT, opener can sign off in 3♣ or 3♦. If instead he bids 3M this usually shows a stopper (looking for 3NT if partner has something in the other major), but may be the first bid with a very strong hand and a 5-card suit. The same applies after a 3♣ or 3♦ response to 1♣.

6 Competitive auctions after 1♣

We do not expect to have the auction to ourselves when we open 1♣. Opponents ought to be even more eager to bid over our 1♣ than if it was natural. If their overcall is 1♠ or higher, then this completely changes the rest of our auction. This is sometimes a big disappointment; but in fact we have much less trouble with our 1♣ opener in competition than many other systems do. This is mainly because opener is very likely to have a strong no-trump hand, and it is fairly safe for responder to assume that this is the case when deciding what to bid.

6.1 Responder's pass

If the opponents bid over 1♣, or double, then responder has the option of passing. Generally we will pass with any hand of 6HCP or fewer unless we have a very good suit. In addition, we normally pass with a hand in the 6-9HCP range if we have length in the suit they bid (whether or not this suit is actually promised by their intervention). We may have to pass with other weakish hands if their intervention is at a sufficiently high level.

If responder does pass, and the next player also passes, then opener should not bid no-trumps with a minimum balanced hand. Normally with a balanced hand of 15-17HCP opener will simply pass the hand out. So, if their intervention is at the 1-level, a 1NT bid from opener should promise about 18-20HCP.

A re-opening double (or redouble) from opener is for take-out. At the 1-level, opener often makes a double with a balanced minimum, particularly if their overcall is artificial in some way. At higher levels, opener should have extra strength or shape in order to double.

6.2 When they double 1♣, or overcall 1♦

Our system of dealing with low-level intervention does not significantly depend on what their calls mean.

1♣:(dbl):1♦ and 1♣:(1♦):dbl show a hand with 4+ hearts and 6+ HCP, i.e. the stronger option of the 1♦ bid. Continuations are as usual, except that we now use opener's 1♠ rebid to show an unbalanced hand with clubs and spades, and show support by bidding hearts or splintering (like after 1♣:1♥).

Bids of 1♥ and above have the same meanings as without the interference, and continuations after those bids are also unaffected. One exception: a 2♦, 2M or 3♣ bid is not natural if their bid shows that suit – instead it is a game-forcing take-out.

After 1♣:(dbl) we also have a redouble available. We can use this to try and take a penalty, so if the double shows clubs our redouble shows club length; if their redouble shows the majors then our redouble shows a good hand with at least three cards in each of clubs, hearts and spades.

6.3 When they overcall 1♥

A 1♥ overcall makes very little difference to our responses. Whatever the meaning of their bid, a pass from responder shows a hand on which we would have responded 1♦ and double shows a hand on which we would have responded 1♥. Higher bids have the same meanings as without the intervention, except for 2♥ which is forcing to game with 5+ hearts, irrespective of whether their overcall actually shows hearts. Another difference is that our 1♠ response now includes balanced hands with 4 hearts.

When responder doubles 1♥, we continue exactly as if the auction had started 1♣:(p):1♥.

6.4 When they overcall 1♠

A 1♠ overcall is usually bad news. It destroys much of our system and it is difficult to penalise. So it is important to have good agreements about how to deal with it. Whether or not 1♠ is natural, we bid as follows:

Pass	A weak hand, or a hand of up to 9HCP without 4 hearts.
Double	6+ HCP with at least 4 hearts.
1NT	Transfer to clubs.
2♣	Transfer to diamonds.
2♦	Transfer to hearts.
2♥	Transfer to spades (even if their 1♠ overcall is supposed to be natural).
2♠	Forcing to game, usually without a spade stop.
2NT	Forcing to game, balanced with a spade stop.
3♣	Invitational, 5-5 clubs and hearts.
3♦	Invitational, 5-5 diamonds and hearts.

The transfers promise a 5-card suit, and show a hand of at least invitational strength. Opener completes the transfer with a minimum hand, and this is not forcing.

After 1♣:(1♠):dbl:(p), opener rebids as follows:

Pass	5+ spades.
1NT	Minimum balanced hand, does not promise a stop.
2♣	Unbalanced with 5+ clubs, forcing for one round.
2♦	Relay, forcing to game.
2♥	Minimum with heart support.
2♠	Heart support, shortage in spades.
2NT	Game force with long diamonds.
3♣	15-17HCP with a very good suit.
3♦	Heart support, shortage in diamonds.

6.5 When they overcall 1NT

The 1NT overcall will usually be artificial. Whatever 1NT means, we need to play double as penalty. Other bids from responder should have the same meanings as they would if we had opened a strong no-trump. For example, a 2♥ bid should be a transfer to spades; opener will break the transfer if he has an unbalanced hand, or a strong (19+ HCP) balanced hand.

6.6 Overcalls at the 2-level and higher

When they overcall 2♣ or higher, we use the same defence that we would use if opener had opened a strong no-trump. I prefer to play double as penalty-oriented – opener is allowed to pull the double if he has an unbalanced hand with shortage in their suit. Some form of Lebensohl is also essential.

6.7 When fourth hand bids

If there is a bid in front of opener, he should nearly always pass with a minimum balanced hand, unless he has support for a suit that partner has shown. So a no-trump bid promises extra strength, usually at least a good 18HCP.

When their bid is at the 1-level, opener's double is for take-out. For example, in the sequence 1♣:(p):1♦:(1♠), opener's double shows 4 hearts, and this bid can be made with a minimum balanced hand.

At the 2-level and above, opener's double tends to show a balanced hand of 19+ HCP. Responder need not have a trump stack to pass this double, particularly at high levels. However, opener does not promise more than a doubleton in their suit. If their bid was at the 2-level, then Lebensohl applies here just like over a weak two.

To show an unbalanced hand, opener usually has to bid a suit. Of course there are some minimum unbalanced hands on which it is too dangerous for opener to do anything other than pass. When opener bids a major suit, this usually shows a strong hand with at least a 5-card suit. However, if RHO's bid is at the 2-level and opener overcalls 2♥ or 2♠, he is showing a two-suited hand with clubs.

7 Opener's 1NT rebid

7.1 Transfer checkback to show hands with a major suit

After $1\clubsuit:1\diamond,1NT$ and $1\clubsuit:1\heartsuit,1NT$ we play a form of transfer checkback. The same thing applies in contested auctions when responder shows a major and opener rebids 1NT, for example in the sequences $1\clubsuit:(1\spadesuit):dbl:(p),1NT$ and $1\clubsuit:(1\diamond):1\heartsuit:(p),1NT$. It also applies even when the 1NT rebid shows a better-than-minimum hand, as long as responder has bid $1\diamond$ or promised a major suit – this happens in auctions such as $1\clubsuit:(dbl):1\diamond:(1\spadesuit),1NT$.

When responder has bid $1\diamond$ or showed a heart suit in some other way, transfer checkback works as follows:

$2\clubsuit$	Forces opener to bid $2\diamond$. Will be either a weak hand with 5+ diamonds or some sort of invitational hand.
$2\diamond$	Transfer to hearts.
$2\heartsuit$	Weak with 5+ hearts and 4 spades. Opener is asked to pass or give preference to $2\spadesuit$.
$2\spadesuit$	Minor-suit Stayman, used for balanced slam tries.
2NT	Transfer to clubs.
$3\heartsuit$	Slam try with a good suit.

Similarly, this is what happens when responder shows spades:

$2\clubsuit$	Forces $2\diamond$.
$2\diamond$	Shows 5+ spades and 4+ hearts, either a weak hand or game-forcing. Opener is asked to give preference.
$2\heartsuit$	Transfer to spades.
$2\spadesuit$	Minor-suit Stayman.
2NT	Transfer to clubs.
$3\spadesuit$	Slam try with a good suit.

After responder bids $2\clubsuit$ and opener replies with the forced $2\diamond$, responder can show his hand as follows:

Pass	A weak hand with 5+ diamonds.
2M	Invitational with a 5-card suit.
2OM	Invitational with a 4-card suit. This therefore promises at least 4-4 in the majors, and in some situations it will promise 5-4 because responder has denied a 4-4 type.
2NT	Invitational; responder will have a major suit of precisely four cards.
3m	Invitational with a 4-card major and a longer minor.

Nearly all game-forcing hands with a 5-card major start by transferring back to the major. If responder does not pass the completion of the transfer then the auction becomes forcing to game. If responder transfers and then rebids 2NT, this shows a hand with a 5-card major and a 4-card minor (the minor is unspecified). If instead he rebids 3m, this shows a 5-5 shape.

7.2 When the response was 1♠

The following applies after 1♣:1♠,1NT and analogous contested sequences.

We do not use transfers here because responder has denied holding a major suit. Responder bids as follows:

2m	Natural, not forcing but mildly constructive.
2♥	Minimum game force, usually at least nine cards in the minors. (After this we follow the 1♠ relay scheme described later, unless opener wants to bid 3NT immediately.)
2♠	Minor-suit Stayman – some slam interest.
2NT	Invitational, balanced.
3m	Slam try with a 5-card suit.
3M	5-5 in the minors, short in the other major.
3NT	Not interested in alternative contracts.

8 Opener's 2♣ rebid

The 2♣ rebid is always natural. It is forcing if responder has promised 6+ HCP, but not forcing if responder has not promised values.

8.1 When 2♣ is not forcing

The 2♣ rebid is not forcing in sequences such as these:

- 1♣:1♦,2♣
- 1♣:1♥,2♣
- 1♣:(p):1♦:(1♠),2♣

In the first two sequences, opener could have bid a relay if he wanted to show a strong hand with clubs. In the third sequence opener would have to double for take-out or cue-bid in order to show a strong hand.

Even though 2♣ is not forcing, we have a 'negative' 2♦ bid available to show hands worth a bid but not good enough to force to game. This bid asks opener to describe his hand, but does not promise a rebid. If opener now bids partner's suit (note that 1♣:1♦,2♣:2♦ implies at least 4 hearts), then he is often only showing a doubleton honour, as usually he has already denied 3-card support.

If opener bids the *other* major at the 2-level, this is natural and not forcing. In order to make a forcing bid, you have to jump or bid a new suit at the 3-level.

Instead of $2\heartsuit$, responder can rebid his major at the 2-level. This shows a good 6-card suit and is constructive.

All other rebids are natural and forcing to game, even $3\clubsuit$. (To make an invitational raise in clubs, start with $2\heartsuit$.)

8.2 When $2\clubsuit$ is forcing

Opener's $2\clubsuit$ rebid is forcing when responder has promised 6+ HCP, for example:

- $1\clubsuit:1\spadesuit,2\clubsuit$
- $1\clubsuit:1NT,2\clubsuit$
- $1\clubsuit:(1\spadesuit):dbl:(p),2\clubsuit$
- $1\clubsuit:(dbl):1\heartsuit:(dbl),2\clubsuit$

In the cases where responder has shown a major suit (such as the last two examples above), we use the same system as over a non-forcing $2\clubsuit$, so that $2\heartsuit$ is a negative, 2M is constructive and everything else is forcing.

When the response was $1\spadesuit$ we do not use an artificial $2\heartsuit$ bid. Instead, any bid at the 2-level is 'natural' (though 2M cannot be a 4-card suit, so it only promises a stop), and forcing to 2NT. Responder's $3\clubsuit$ bid is forcing; other bids at the 3-level are splinters.

After $1\clubsuit:1NT,2\clubsuit$, we bid naturally. Responder's reverses should promise extra values – with a minimum game force he will usually rebid $2\heartsuit$ or $3\clubsuit$.

9 Relays

9.1 An apology

Using the sequences $1\clubsuit:1\heartsuit,1\spadesuit$ and $1\clubsuit:1\spadesuit,1\heartsuit$ to show strong hands is an essential part of the system. However there are many different ways of organising the responses to the relays. The methods that I will describe here are rather idiosyncratic, and are also fairly complicated. Part of the complexity comes from the fact that the response to $1\clubsuit$ depends on the strength of our hand as well as the shape – this is the main reason for the lack of symmetry in the relays.

There is not enough space available for responder to be able to describe his shape completely and still have room below 3NT to give some indication of the strength of his hand. So we have to make a decision about what it is most important for responder to say. My preference is to show strength first, and only describe the more important aspects of shape. Inevitably, this means that in some sequences opener is not able to find out responder's exact distribution. Most relay systems I know of *do* allow you to find out the exact distribution, so I suppose mine is deficient in this respect. But you can't do everything.

9.2 Showing the strength of the hand

When responding to $1\clubsuit$ we usually think of the strength of the hand as falling into one of four ranges:

- Weak: not enough for game opposite a balanced 18HCP hand. So typically 0-5HCP.
- Minimum (MIN): About 6-9HCP.
- Medium (MED): Enough to force to game, usually 10+ HCP if balanced.
- Strong (STR): About 13HCP if balanced, maybe less if unbalanced with good suits.

Thus, when opener decides to relay, responder's first reply usually indicates which of these ranges his hand belongs to. Remember that sometimes the response to $1\clubsuit$ is different depending on what strength the hand is; for example, with a 4=1=3=5 shape we respond $1\diamondsuit$ if weak, $1\heartsuit$ if MIN, and $2\clubsuit$ if MED or STR. If we forget this, and respond $1\heartsuit$ with a strong hand, say, then we have to pretend that our hand has minimum strength when we respond to partner's relays, otherwise we will not be able to show the correct shape of the hand. If partner then signs off and we take another bid, hopefully he will get the message that something has gone wrong.

9.3 The major-suit relay

The major-suit relay is the name given to the relay sequences which start $1\clubsuit:1\diamondsuit,1\heartsuit$ and $1\clubsuit:1\heartsuit,1\spadesuit$. Of course, in the first of these sequences, responder may not actually have a major suit at all, but in this case he will respond $1\spadesuit$ to the relay (showing a weak hand with at most 4 hearts), which takes the partnership out of the major-suit relay scheme. We also respond $1\spadesuit$ to the $1\heartsuit$ relay whenever we have a hand which is precisely 4-4 in the majors. The other replies to the relay do not depend on whether the response was $1\diamondsuit$ or $1\heartsuit$. They are as follows:

1NT	Weak (promises a 5-card major).
$2\clubsuit$	Any MIN.
$2\diamondsuit$	MED with a 5-card major.
$2\heartsuit$	MED or STR with precisely 4 cards in the major.
$2\spadesuit+$	STR with a 5-card major.

So, when responder has a strong hand with a 5-card major, his reply to the major-suit relay is a bid of $2\spadesuit$ or higher. He chooses his bid according to the '5-card major scheme', which will be described later.

After $1\clubsuit:1\diamond,1\heartsuit:1NT$ or $1\clubsuit:1\heartsuit,1\spadesuit:1NT$ opener usually signs off in 2M with a minimum, or he might pass 1NT with a misfit. Alternatively he can bid $2\clubsuit$, which shows a hand of about 18-22HCP with a 5-card or longer club suit. With a strong balanced hand, or a game-forcing hand with clubs, opener can bid $2\diamond$, which is the next relay. This has responses as follows:

$2\heartsuit$	A very weak hand.
$2\spadesuit+$	A few values – about 3-5HCP, forcing to game. We choose our bid according to the 5-card major scheme, i.e. our bids show exactly the same shapes as an immediate $2\spadesuit$ response to the relay would with a strong hand.

After $1\clubsuit:1\diamond,1\heartsuit:2\clubsuit$ or $1\clubsuit:1\heartsuit,1\spadesuit:2\clubsuit$, opener nearly always bids the next relay, which is $2\diamond$. Now, if responder has a 4-card major he bids $2\heartsuit$, whereas with a 5-card or longer major he makes a bid of $2\spadesuit$ or higher, according to the 5-card major scheme.

The $2\diamond$ response to the relay shows a MED hand, and *promises* a 5-card major. So when opener bids $2\heartsuit$, the reply is again the one dictated by the 5-card major scheme, which starts at $2\spadesuit$.

9.4 The major-suit relay: 5-card major scheme

The 5-card major scheme consists of bids from $2\spadesuit$ upwards. If responder has a STR hand, he uses these bids immediately in response to the 1M relay, whereas with any weaker hand he starts by showing his strength, then can use the 5-card major scheme to show his shape in reply to the next relay. So, whatever the strength of responder's hand, these bids always show the same shapes. They work as follows:

$2\spadesuit$	Precisely 5 cards in the major; no other 5-card suit, not a 5-3-3-2 shape with a weak 5-card suit.
2NT	6-card or longer major, not 4 cards in the other major.
3m/3OM	Natural, at least 5-5 shape.
3M	5-3-3-2 with a weak 5-card suit.
3NT	6-card major, 4 cards in the other major, shortage in diamonds.
$4\clubsuit$	6-card major, 4 cards in the other major, shortage in clubs.

After the $2\spadesuit$ response, 2NT asks for more information:

3♣	Four cards in the unbid major. (After this, 3♦ asks for shortage – 3♥ shows diamond shortage, 3♠ shows club shortage and 3NT shows a 5-4-2-2.)
3♦	No shortage, not four cards in the unbid major. (Now 3♥ asks partner to show whether he has a 4-card minor: 3♠ = 4 clubs, 3NT = no minor, 4♣ = 4 diamonds.)
3♥	Shortage in the unbid major. (Now 3♠ asks partner about his length in the minor suits: 3NT = 4 clubs, 4♣ = 4 diamonds, 4♦ = 5440.)
3♠	Short diamonds, not four cards in the unbid major.
3NT	Short clubs, not four cards in the unbid major.

(Notice that when we use bids to show shortage, the cheapest of these bids always shows the highest-ranking shortage. This principle applies throughout the relays.)

Similarly after the 2NT response showing a 6-card major, 3♣ is a further relay:

3♦	Shortage in the unbid major, or a 7222 shape. (Now 3♥ is a relay, with a 3♠ response showing 7222 and others as 3NT+ below.)
3♥	Shortage in diamonds. (Now 3♠ is a relay with responses as 3NT+ below.)
3♠	No shortage: 6322 shape.
3NT	6-card suit, singleton club.
4♣	6-card suit, void club.
4♦	7-card suit, singleton club.
4♥	7-card suit, void club.

9.5 The major-suit relay: 4-card major schemes

Responder shows a 4-card major by bidding 2♥ at some point:

- 1♣:1♦,1♥:2♥ or 1♣:1♥,1♠:2♥ shows a MED or STR hand with a 4-card major.
- 1♣:1♦,1♥:2♣,2♦:2♥ or 1♣:1♥,1♠:2♣,2♦:2♥ shows a MIN hand with a 4-card major.

In each case, opener usually relays again by bidding 2NT (not 2♠ because we need to be careful to right-side no-trump contracts). The responses to this depend on what strength responder has shown, and indeed more different shapes are possible when responder has a minimum, because of the way we respond to 1♣.

After 1♣:1♦,1♥:2♥,2NT and 1♣:1♥,1♠:2♥,2NT –

3♣	MED, not a 4441. (Now 3♦ is a relay for shape with the same responses as for STR hands below.)
3♦	4441 short in the other major, any strength. (Now 3♥ relays for strength.)
3♥	STR, balanced (no 5-card minor). (Now 3♠ asks whether responder has a 4-card minor.)
3♠	STR, semi-balanced with 5 clubs.
3NT	STR, semi-balanced with 5 diamonds.

After 1♣:1♦,1♥:2♣,2♦:2♥,2NT and 1♣:1♥,1♠:2♣,2♦:2♥,2NT –

3♣	No shortage. (Now 3♦ is a relay – responder bids 3♥ with a balanced hand (after which 3♠ is minor-suit Stayman), 3♠ with 5 clubs, 3NT with 5 diamonds.)
3♦	Short in the other major. (Now 3♥ is another relay, with 3♠ showing 5 clubs, 3NT showing a 4441, 4♣ showing 5 diamonds, 4♦ showing 6 diamonds.)
3♥	Short in diamonds – must have at least 5 clubs because we have shown at most 4-3 (or 3-4) in the majors.
3♠	Short in clubs, 5 diamonds.
3NT	Short in clubs, 6 diamonds.

9.6 The major-suit relay after a negative double

Part of the major-suit relay system applies in the sequence 1♣:(1♠):dbl:(p),2♦. Here responder has shown 4+ hearts and at least a MIN hand. Furthermore he will not have a MED or STR hand with 5+ hearts, otherwise he would have started with a transfer. Opener's 2♦ bid is a relay, and the responses are as follows:

2♥	Any hand with precisely 4 hearts. After this we use the MIN version of the 4-card major scheme, but responder can go past 3NT with a stronger hand (note that opener has promised 18HCP by bidding 2♦ here).
2♠+	5+ hearts, MIN, following the 5-card major scheme.

9.7 The minor-suit relay

The minor-suit relay starts 1♣:1NT,2♦ or 1♣:2♣,2♦. In both cases responder has shown enough strength to force to game, i.e. his hand must be either MED or STR.

The responses to the 2♦ relay are as follows:

2♥	MED without 4 hearts. (After this, 2♠ relays for shape with responses as for 2NT+ below.)
2♠	4 hearts, any strength.
2NT	STR, any 6322 or 7222. (Now 3♣ is a relay for the 3-card suit with 3NT showing the 7222.)
3♣	STR, 4 spades, not 7411. (Now 3♦ asks for shortage – 3♥ = short in hearts, 3♠ = short in other minor, 3NT = no shortage.)
3♦	STR, no 4-card major, spade shortage.
3♥	STR, no 4-card major, heart shortage.
3♠	STR, no 4-card major, short in the other minor.
3NT	STR 7411 with 4 spades.

Note that when responder denies a 4-card major, his minor suit must be at least six cards long. This is because with a minor two-suiter the bidding would have started 1♣:1♠.

After 2♠ showing hearts, there is a 2NT relay:

3♣	any MED except 7411. (Followed by a 3♦ relay with responses as below.)
3♦	7411, any strength.
3♥	STR, short in spades.
3♠	STR, short in the other minor.
3NT	STR 5422.

9.8 The 1♠ relay

After 1♣:1♠, the relay is 2♦. Responder can have a MIN, MED or STR hand for his 1♠ bid, but if MIN he will not usually be 5-5 in the minors otherwise the response to 1♣ might have been 2NT. So our responses to the relay are:

2♥	any MED. (Now 2♠ is a relay for shape with responses as for 2NT+ below.)
2♠	any MIN, not 5-5 or better in the minors. (Now 2NT is a relay for shape with responses as for 3♣+ below.)
2NT	STR, at least 5-5 in the minors. (Now 3♣ relays – 3♦ = spade shortage, 3♥ = heart shortage, 3♠ = 1=1=5=6, 3NT = 1=1=6=5.)
3♣	STR, 5+ clubs. (Now there is a 3♦ relay, with responses as for those hands with diamonds below.)
3♦	STR, balanced, no 5-card minor. (3♥ relay – 3♠ = 3=3=3=4, 3NT = 3=3=4=3, 4♣ = 4-4 in minors.)
3♥	STR, 5+ diamonds, no shortage. (3♠ relay – 3NT = 5-3-3-2, 4♣ = 5-4-2-2 with 4 clubs, 4♦ = 6-3-2-2.)
3♠	STR, 5+ diamonds, 4 clubs, short spades.
3NT	STR, 5+ diamonds, 4 clubs, short hearts.

It is important to remember that here the cheapest bid shows a better-than-minimum hand.

9.9 Signing off, and slam bidding

As soon as opener knows what the final contract should be, he should bid it. A bid of 3NT by opener is always to play (except when responder has shown a 6-card major), and so is any bid of game in a suit where partner has shown 3 cards or more. We assume that opener will never want to play in a suit where partner has fewer than 3 cards, because he only ever relays with a balanced hand.

When we want to look for slam as opener, we nearly always keep relaying until we have as much information as possible about partner's hand. After that we are often in an excellent position to set the contract. But sometimes we do need to get more information. One way to do this is to bid 4NT, which is always quantitative unless partner has shown a 6-card major. For more delicate slam investigation, we start by setting a trump suit.

The following bids can be used to set a suit as trumps:

- 4♣;
- 4♦;
- Any bid of game in a suit where partner has not promised 3+ cards;
- 4NT when partner has shown a 6-card major.

Of these bids, the cheapest available sets opener's longest suit as trumps. The next cheapest sets opener's second-longest suit as trumps. If opener has shown two suits of equal length, the higher-ranking one is treated as being longer for this purpose. Very occasionally the relative length of opener's suits is not clear, and in this case we again treat the higher-ranking one as being longer.

These bids which set trumps can be used at any stage of the relays, but we usually wait until we know as much as possible about partner's shape. Sometimes we need to start earlier, if we can see that a particular response to our next relay would leave us without a cheap way of setting the trump suit that we want.

When opener sets the trump suit, his partner should give Roman Key-Card replies in the usual way:

step 1	1 or 4 key-cards (next step from opener asks about the queen of trumps)
step 2	0 or 3 key-cards (next step from opener asks about the queen of trumps)
step 3	2 key-cards, no queen of trumps
step 4	2 key-cards and the queen of trumps

After these replies, opener can bid a new suit to ask about partner's holding in that suit – step 1 denies an honour, step 2 shows the queen, step 3 shows the king or ace+queen, step 4 shows the ace or king+queen, step 5 shows ace+king.

9.10 Relay breaks

One sort of relay break is the key-card ask described above. The other important situation where relay breaks apply is in the major-suit relays. The system dictates that opener has to bid the 1M relay with a strong unbalanced hand with clubs; usually if he holds this hand he will not continue to relay. The relay breaks have the following meanings:

- Breaking to partner's suit shows an unbalanced hand with 3-card support.
- $1\clubsuit:1\heartsuit, 1\heartsuit:2\heartsuit, 2\spadesuit$ also shows an unbalanced hand with 3-card support. (Remember that 2NT is the relay over 2♥.)
- Breaking to $3\clubsuit$ shows a good 6-card club suit. If this break is over a $2\clubsuit$ or $2\heartsuit$ bid, then it shows shortage in partner's suit (singleton or void).
- Breaking to a new suit (but not $1\clubsuit:1\heartsuit, 1\heartsuit:2\heartsuit, 2\spadesuit$) shows a two-suiter with clubs. Again, if this break is directly over $2\clubsuit$ or $2\heartsuit$, then it shows shortage in partner's suit.
- Breaking to 2NT shows a three-suiter with shortage in partner's suit.
- If you relay over $2\clubsuit$ or $2\heartsuit$ and then break on the next round, you are showing 5+ clubs and precisely doubleton in partner's suit.

Note that this only applies to relay breaks of $3\spadesuit$ and below. If the bidding has got too high for you to make your natural relay break, then you have to keep relaying. But that is a very rare situation to be in.

Further bidding after a relay break is natural.

9.11 Interference in relay auctions

We do not expect much interference in our relay auctions, because both opponents have already had the chance to bid. However, some people like to disrupt relay auctions just for the sake of it, so it is vitally important to make sure we know what we are doing.

My preference is to ignore their intervention whenever possible, unless we want to take a penalty from it.

- If they double a relay, or double a response to a relay, then we ignore their double unless we want to try and play a redoubled contract. If we pass or redouble then relays stop.

- If they make the cheapest possible bid at any point, we pass if that is the bid we were going to make. The relays can then carry on as normal. Alternatively, either player can double to suggest taking a penalty, but this ends the relay sequence.
- If an opponent makes the second-cheapest bid *over a game-forcing relay*, then pass says that responder would have bid step 1 (after which double is the relay), and double says that responder would have made his RHO's bid. In any case, the relays then continue as normal.
- If an opponent makes the second-cheapest bid over a game-forcing *response* to a relay, then pass is the next relay (with double showing step 1, etc.), and double is for penalty.
- If an opponent makes a higher bid then we revert to natural bidding.⁴

⁴It would be better in theory to be able to continue relaying in these situations. However, because we have less space available, we would need to make significant changes to our responses, and this would be too difficult to remember. (In some cases we could get away with using the normal responses but moving them one or two steps higher. But this doesn't always work – for example in our normal relay schemes we often bid 3NT on certain types of hands where it would be suicidal to bid 4♣.)